Background

From a peak in the 1970s, there have been significant reductions in the number of traffic related fatalities in Minnesota which led to noticeable decreases in the fatal crash rate. However, after 1980 there has been an increasing trend in the number of traffic fatalities while the trend in the fatal crash rate has flattened. The pattern in Minnesota's traffic fatalities has paralleled what has been occurring at the national level. This lack of progress on reducing fatalities led the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Official's (AASHTO) to create the Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP). The SHSP acknowledged the need for the states to look at traffic safety in a new way and identified 22 emphasis areas where the greatest number of lives can be saved. In Minnesota, a review of the fatal crash data revealed that some of the key contributing factors (young drivers, impaired drivers, aggressive drivers, unbelted vehicle occupants, lane departure crashes, and intersection crashes) are directly related to the original 22 emphasis areas.

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The National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) has published a set of guides based on the SHSP to assist state and local agencies identify and implement strategies in many of the emphasis areas. FHWA has also encouraged state transportation agencies to develop their own Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan (CHSP). The key principles for a state CHSP are to: be data driven; be inclusive of the four safety "Es"; address local roadway system needs; be comprehensive by reaching out to and coordinating with the state's safety partners; and be more strategic by addressing traffic safety in both a proactive and reactive manner.

Minnesota's CHSP Development Process

Since the previous approach to traffic safety has not continued to decrease the number of traffic fatalities, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) and Department of Public Safety (DPS) have partnered to address the State's traffic safety issues in a coordinated, integrated, and systematic approach by preparing the Minnesota CHSP. The purpose of the CHSP is to address the crash problems in Minnesota by focusing on the number of lives lost, as opposed to the fatal crash rate. The goal of the Minnesota CHSP is to reduce the number of traffic fatalities to 500 or less per year by 2008, from a current level of approximately 650 traffic fatalities per year.

The Minnesota plan is being built upon AASHTO's SHSP and the NCHRP Series 500 Implementation Guides. The approach has actively involved the State's safety partners through two workshops and a self-assessment survey. The two workshops had a combined attendance of over 100 persons, with attendees from a wide diversity of agencies and organizations, including: Minnesota Supreme Court, Minnesota State Patrol, local law enforcement, DPS, Driver & Vehicle Services, metropolitan and greater Minnesota EMS, driver education, universities, FHWA, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, Mn/DOT, county and city engineering departments, consulting firms,

and safety organizations (i.e., Safe Communities of Wright County, MADD, and AAA). By providing the safety partners a forum to voice their concerns and ideas, it has resulted in the Minnesota plan addressing the State's needs in the "Four Es."

The Minnesota CHSP

From AASHTO's original 22 emphasis areas, Mn/DOT, DPS and their safety partners identified the 10 emphasis areas that were the most important to Minnesota. These emphasis areas were grouped into five Critical Emphasis Areas (CEAs) based upon similarities and relationships in the challenges facing each.

CEA 1 – Reducing Impaired Driving & Increasing Seat Belt Use
CEA 2 – Improving the Design and Operation of Highway Intersections
CEA 3 – Addressing Young Drivers Over Involvement & Curbing Aggressive Driving
CEA 4 – Reducing Head-On and Across-Median Crashes, Keeping Vehicles on the Roadway & Minimizing the Consequences of Leaving the Road
CEA 5 – Increasing Driver Safety Awareness & Improving Information Systems

For the CEAs, 15 Critical Strategies were then identified (see **Table 1**). Based on the data driven prioritization process, Critical Strategies have the greatest ability to reduce the number of traffic fatalities and serious injuries. For each Critical Strategy, an action plan has been developed along with implementation goals for Year 1.

TABLE 1
Minnesota's Critical Strategies

1. Provide adequate law enforcement resources	8. Cost effective intersection improvements
2. Primary seat belt law	9. Roadway maintenance
3. Implement automated enforcement	10. Enforce traffic safety laws
4. Stricter graduated driver licensing system	11. Targeted enforcement
5. Cost effective lane departure improvements	12. Enhance driver education
6. Communication and marketing task force	13. Road Safety Audits
7. Governor's traffic safety panel and legislature action committee	14. Improve Data System
	15. Statewide Trauma System

It was determined that to optimize the effectiveness of the State's investment in safety projects and to meet interim goals for reduction in fatalities, implementation of the Critical Strategies must focus on addressing all four "Es". Further, at Mn/DOT there is a new focus on providing local agencies with funding, training, and technical assistance (similar to DPS) in order to address the fact that historically over 45% of fatal crashes occur on local roadways. The *CHSP Safety Toolbox* was one such tool developed for this purpose. The *CHSP Safety Toolbox* is a companion document to the CHSP written with the intent of providing local agencies guidance in developing, prioritizing, and implementing safety projects in their jurisdiction.

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